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Deposited in DRO:

16 August 2019

Version of attached file:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Kirby, James (2020) 'Between two Chinas and two Koreas : African agency and non-alignment in 1970s Botswana.', *Cold War history.*, 20 (1). pp. 21-38.

Further information on publisher's website:

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2019.1632291>

Publisher's copyright statement:

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Between Two Chinas and Two Koreas: African Agency and Non-Alignment in 1970s Botswana

Abstract

This article explains Botswana's non-aligned stance at the United Nations in the 1970s. It focuses on two diplomatic wars between China and Taiwan, and between North Korea and South Korea. Botswana's position was challenged by intimidation from South Africa and Rhodesia, and threats to cut off aid from the United States. Gaborone was concerned with building its legitimacy among African states who questioned Botswana's anti-colonial and anti-apartheid credentials. New archival research reveals that President Seretse Khama, when managing Cold War and southern African geopolitics, used the China and Korea questions to assert Botswana's agency and sovereignty as a non-aligned state.

Key Words

Botswana; non-alignment; United Nations; China; Korea

Word Count

9,983

Introduction

Botswana's position and outlook towards the Cold War was difficult to comprehend for Western governments during the 1970s. British and American diplomats routinely characterised Botswana as pro-Western and 'basically on our side'.¹ Seretse Khama, the President from independence in 1966 to his death in 1980, upheld Western principles of democracy and individual human rights. Botswana's key aid donors were primarily North

¹ Foreign and Commonwealth Office brief on Seretse, 3 November 1970, The National Archives, Kew (TNA) FCO 45/704; Embassy Gaborone to Department of State, 12 June 1978, US National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79 Electronic Telegrams, 1978GABORO01773.

American and Western European. Gaborone was slow to establish relations with countries from the East. Seretse told Edward Heath, the British Prime Minister, in December 1970 that he was afraid of Communism and Communists in Botswana.² His country was officially non-aligned, but few in the West thought that Seretse took the non-aligned movement seriously. He joked to G. D. Anderson, the British High Commissioner, in May 1973 that ‘everybody knows who is really aligned and who is truly non-aligned’. Anderson thought this was amusingly cynical of non-alignment.³ Yet, the joke was ultimately on Western powers who assumed they could count on Botswana’s allegiance in Cold War contests and were denied it at key moments on the international stage.

Gaborone’s foreign policy-making was inexperienced in the early 1970s, but proved to be staunchly independent by the middle of the decade. This is shown in Botswana’s non-aligned, and generally anti-Western, stance on two important questions on East Asia at the United Nations (UN): firstly, the 1971 resolution to recognise the People’s Republic of China (PRC or mainland China) over the Republic of China (ROC or Taiwan) as the rightful representatives of China; and, secondly, the 1974-75 resolutions aimed at peaceful reunification on the Korean Peninsula. These standpoints culminated in the establishment of Botswana’s diplomatic relations with the PRC and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea), and Seretse’s historic 1976 visit to Beijing and Pyongyang. Gaborone’s approach to these international quarrels in East Asia was more intricate than simply negotiating the East-West divide.

² Record of Heath’s meeting with Seretse, 6 November 1970, TNA FCO 45/704.

³ Anderson to Foster, 17 May 1973, TNA FCO 45/1282.

Seretse interpreted Cold War issues as secondary to more immediate strategic priorities in the region. The concern was not so much with how to manage East and West, but countries north and south of Botswana on the African continent. The government sought to balance, on the one hand, its political affiliation with independent African states and liberation groups and, on the other hand, its unavoidable economic links with neighbouring white minority regimes. Botswana's non-aligned credentials helped it to build legitimacy within the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the Frontline States (FLS) in southern Africa. This was critical in the 1970s, as regional conflict and instability increasingly threatened Botswana's security and undermined its territorial integrity. The 'Cold War lens', when applied exclusively, was misleading for Western diplomats seeking to influence and predict Botswana's actions. It therefore remains insufficient for historians attempting to grasp the full extent of African agency from places like Gaborone.

Scholars, in recent years, have steadily incorporated the colonial and post-colonial world within the history of the Cold War.⁴ Odd Arne Westad delivered a major revision by contending the Cold War was inextricably linked to decolonisation and the creation of the Third World.⁵ Several case studies followed, using a 'Cold War lens' to link urban, national, and regional histories from Africa and Asia to the macro history of the Cold War.⁶ Historians, in other segments of emerging scholarship on the Global South, were encouraged to consider the merits of 'taking off the Cold War lens'. This allowed for alternative points of cooperation and contestation to become transparent. Matthew Connelly suggested historical

⁴ Natasa Miskovic, "Introduction", in *The Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War: Delhi - Bandung - Belgrade*, ed. Natasa Miskovic, Harald Fischer-Tiné, and Nada Boskovska (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 13; Robert J. McMahon, ed., *The Cold War in the Third World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁵ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 74, 396.

⁶ Elizabeth Schmidt, *Cold War and Decolonization in Guinea, 1946-1958* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), 5; Sergey Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War: The USSR in West Africa and the Congo, 1956-1964* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Centre Press, 2010).

actors may not have been as transfixed on the East-West divide as the historians who studied them.⁷ The Global South, in the 1960s and 1970s, coalesced around the issues of race, apartheid, development, and the right to national self-determination.⁸ The more the non-aligned movement became institutionalised, the more the conflict of the Global North and Global South began to rival that of East and West.⁹ When exploring South-South relations, as depicted by Gerard McCann, the Cold War may be better illustrated as ‘the background music, rather than the lyrics’.¹⁰ Afro-Asian networks could develop without direct interference or control from the United States (US) or the Soviet Union. In these settings, non-Western actors set their own agenda according to their own preferences, needs, and ideologies.

This new literature has commanded greater attention to the agency of African leaders at the margins of the East-West conflict.¹¹ Some writers, using the ‘Cold War lens’, showed how African states could withstand interference from the superpowers, defend their interests, and assert themselves as global players. However, in this viewpoint, the post-colonial world was automatically relegated to a subaltern position, whereby all initiatives were categorised as a response or resistance to external powers. At best, Third World statesmen could exploit Cold War rivalries to their own advantage or, at worst, find themselves on one side of an

⁷ Matthew Connelly, “Taking Off the Cold War Lens: Visions of North-South Conflict during the Algerian War for Independence”, *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 3 (2000): 742. See also Bevan Sewell and Scott Lucas, “Introduction”, in *Challenging US Foreign Policy: America and the World in the Long Twentieth Century*, ed. Bevan Sewell and Scott Lucas (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1-2.

⁸ Jason Parker, “Ideology, Race and Nonalignment in US Cold War Foreign Relations: or, How the Cold War Racialized Neutralism Without Neutralizing Race”, in *Challenging US Foreign Policy*, ed. Sewell and Lucas, 75-98.

⁹ Jürgen Dinkel, “‘Third world begins to flex its muscles’: The Non-Aligned Movement and the North-South Conflict during the 1970s”, in *Neutrality and Neutralism in the Global Cold War: Between or Within the Blocs?*, eds. Sandra Bott and others (Routledge: Milton Park, 2016), 108-23.

¹⁰ Gerard McCann, “From Diaspora to Third Worldism and the United Nations: India and the Politics of Decolonizing Africa”, *Past and Present* 218, supplement 8 (2013): 259-60.

¹¹ Janick Marina Schaufelbuehl and others, “Non-Alignment, the Third Force, or Fence-Sitting: Independent Pathways in the Cold War”, *The International History Review* 37, no. 5 (2015): 902.

inflamed proxy war.¹² Frank Gerits, inspired by the challenge set by Frederick Cooper for Africanists to break free from the subaltern narrative, investigated the notion that African actors could shape the impact of the Cold War on the continent. This can only be accomplished by spotlighting inter-African politics, African agency, and Africa's influence upon the international system.¹³ A multi-focal approach that accounts for non-Western forces of action and overlapping geopolitical tensions can only enhance our understanding of the Cold War in the Global South.

Scholars of Botswana have written little on the country's non-aligned stance and its relations in East Asia.¹⁴ This article features new research from archives in Botswana, the United Kingdom, and the US, including the papers of David Benjamin Bolen, the American Ambassador to Botswana from 1974 to 1976. It argues that Seretse's government used the Chinese and Korean diplomatic wars at the UN to assert Botswana's agency as a non-aligned state. This was a vital course of action as it diversified Gaborone's external support network, gave the government greater credibility in the OAU, and helped to reaffirm Botswana's state security. Botswana's autonomy was somewhat easier to express after the discovery of diamonds in 1967 and the achievement of budgetary self-sufficiency by 1973.¹⁵ Regardless, the stakes of a miscalculation in foreign policy should not be underestimated. Economic progress did little, if anything, to change the geopolitical reality that Botswana was

¹² Natasa Miskovic, "Introduction", 13; Robert J. McMahon, "Introduction", in *The Cold War*, ed. McMahon, 3-4, 8-9.

¹³ Frederick Cooper, "Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History", *The American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 (1994): 1516-45; Frank Gerits, "'When the Bull Elephants Fight': Kwame Nkrumah, Non-Alignment, and Pan-Africanism as an Interventionist Ideology in the Global Cold War (1957-66)", *The International History Review* 37, no. 5 (2015): 953, 964.

¹⁴ Ian Taylor, "Botswana's 'Independent Foreign Policy': Gaborone-Beijing Relations", *Botswana Notes and Records* 30 (1998): 79-86; Maitseo Bolaane, "China's Relations with Botswana: An Historical Perspective", in *Afro-Chinese Relations: Past, Present and Future*, ed. Kwesi Kwaa Prah (Cape Town: Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society, 2007), 142-74.

¹⁵ Michael Niemann, "Diamonds Are a State's Best Friend: Botswana's Foreign Policy in Southern Africa", *Africa Today* 40, no. 1 (1993): 27-47.

vulnerable as a landlocked country in a volatile region surrounded by, and dependent upon, hostile white minority regimes in South Africa and Rhodesia.¹⁶ Gaborone faced political and economic pressures from multiple fronts and its room for manoeuvre was limited. Given the risks involved, the significance of Botswana's diplomacy in international forums deserves careful consideration.

Seretse, by undertaking a defiantly non-aligned position on the Cold War battlegrounds in East Asia, proved that Botswana owed allegiance to no foreign power. His voting instructions to Botswana's UN delegates disappointed and disconcerted Western donors. The President was aware of how these actions could jeopardise Botswana's ongoing aid links and antagonise its powerful neighbours. It was more important to show Botswana, despite its external dependencies, was an independent state and free to make its own choices. Indeed, the world came to recognise this and worked extensively to secure Botswana's cooperation on these international disputes. Geopolitics in southern Africa, not East Asia or the Cold War, guided Gaborone's decision-making on the two Chinas and two Koreas.

From colonial Bechuanaland to non-aligned Botswana

The Bechuanaland Protectorate (later Botswana) was fully occupied by the British in 1885. Britain used the territory to secure an access path to the north and curb expansionism from the Boers and other colonial powers in the region. Tswana chieftaincies shared similar anxieties over outside encroachment and either accepted or acquiesced to British claims of 'protection'. The British, without much at stake in the territory economically or strategically, dedicated little resources to development.¹⁷ Bechuanaland formed one of three South African

¹⁶ Richard Dale, *Botswana's Search for Autonomy in Southern Africa* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995).

¹⁷ Fred Morton and Jeff Ramsay, eds., *The Birth of Botswana: A History of the Bechuanaland Protectorate from 1910 to 1966* (Gaborone: Longman Botswana, 1987); W. A. Edge and M. H. Lekorwe, eds., *Botswana: Politics and Society* (Pretoria: J. L. van Schaik Academic, 1998).

High Commission Territories (HCTs), alongside Basutoland (Lesotho) and Swaziland. The HCTs, according to the Act to create the Union of South Africa in 1910, were to be eventually incorporated into the Union. British politicians over the decades found it too politically difficult to transfer the HCTs, given the rising international outcry over the racist policies of the Union government. The apartheid regime's creation in 1948, installing an ethno-nationalist agenda for racial separation, and South Africa's move to become a Republic and exit the Commonwealth in 1961, ended any realistic prospect of incorporation.¹⁸ Hendrik Verwoerd, the Prime Minister of South Africa, as late as September 1963, offered Bechuanaland to join as a 'Bantustan' homeland of South Africa under his policy of separate development, which sought to geographically segregate each ethnic group.¹⁹ Instead, Bechuanaland followed the path to genuine national self-determination on 30 September 1966.

Seretse Khama was born to inherit the throne of the Bamangwato people, the largest chieftaincy in Bechuanaland. He was compelled to abdicate his claim to the chieftom to end his British-imposed exile from 1950 to 1956. The Prince caused diplomatic problems between Britain and the apartheid regime for his marriage to Ruth Williams, a white woman in London.²⁰ He entered party politics in the early 1960s when he formed the Bechuanaland Democratic Party (later Botswana Democratic Party or BDP) and became Prime Minister after winning elections for self-government on 1 March 1965. The BDP overwhelmingly defeated the Bechuanaland People's Party, which was a deeply fractured entity committed to

¹⁸ Ronald Hyam, *The Failure of South African Expansion 1908-1948* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1972).

¹⁹ Hendrik Verwoerd, *Dr. H. F. Verwoerd on I. Crisis in World Conscience II. The Road to Freedom for: Basutoland, Bechuanaland, Swaziland* (Pretoria: Department of Information, 1963), 12; Saul Dubow, *Apartheid: 1948-1994* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 105-13.

²⁰ Susan Williams, *Colour Bar: The Triumph of Seretse Khama and His Nation* (London: Penguin Books, 2007).

anti-colonialism, Pan-Africanism, and African Socialism.²¹ Botswana's lead up to independence was unusual for its lack of a mass nationalist movement. The BDP worked closely with the British in the Executive Council and Legislative Council, pledged to protect the property rights of white settlers (less than 1 per cent of the population), and favoured a gradualist transition to self-government.²²

Seretse was more worried about the viability of Botswana as an independent state than any call for immediate independence. Population numbers were low, at less than 600,000, for a country around the size of France. Infrastructure was poor and very few citizens had a secondary or university level of education. Tens of thousands of Botswana's adult males were drawn to South African mines to find work. There were early signs that the region's racial conflicts would get much worse in the years ahead. African protestors were massacred at Sharpeville in March 1960 and Rhodesia's white minority regime, led by Prime Minister Ian Smith, illegally announced a Unilateral Declaration of Independence in November 1965.²³ Botswana did not have a military until 1977 and its local police was incapable of halting incursions from South African and Rhodesian forces chasing suspected freedom fighters.

The country ultimately overcame such challenges and threats to become one of the most prominent stories of political and economic success in Africa.²⁴ Seretse's government

²¹ Barry Morton, Jeff Ramsay, and Fish Keitseng, *Comrade Fish: Memories of a Motswana in the ANC Underground* (Gaborone: Pula Press, 1999).

²² James Kirby, "'Conditional on a Bill of Rights': Race and Human Rights in the Constitution of Botswana, 1960-66", *law&history* 4, no. 1 (2017): 30-61.

²³ Tom Lodge, *Sharpeville: An Apartheid Massacre and its Consequences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Luise White, *Unpopular Sovereignty: Rhodesian Independence and African Decolonisation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

²⁴ For accounts of Botswana's success, see Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* (New York: Crown Business, 2012); J. Clark Leith, *Why Botswana Prospered* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005). For important counter arguments, see Kenneth Good, "Interpreting the Exceptionality of Botswana", *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 30, no. 1 (1992):

was effective in attracting vast amounts of foreign aid from North America and Western Europe. It also managed a mining boom with limited instances of corruption and maintained one of the best human rights records on the continent. Seretse's state philosophy of non-racial democracy appealed to Western donors who sought to reward good governance and promote a prosperous model of racial harmony to undermine the apartheid ideology. The US became a prominent aid donor to Botswana giving, in constant US dollars (USD), over \$432 million in grants and loans between 1965 to 1980. This included funding for the Bot-Zam road project in the 1970s to further economic links with neighbouring Zambia, which had a tiny border with Botswana to the north. Many American policy-makers and politicians affiliated with Seretse's liberal-democratic principles. Washington wanted to use its aid to Botswana to promote its own image on the continent, showing African leaders that the US supported racial equality and self-determination for Africans.²⁵

Fellow independent African countries further north were much harder to impress than Westerners. Botswana was perceived by leading icons of the OAU, like Tanzania's President Julius Nyerere, as a satellite or client state of South Africa.²⁶ The BDP did not have sufficient anti-colonial credentials in its moderate approach to independence and appeared too cooperative with the white minority regimes. Gaborone required OAU solidarity to benefit from Africa's mass voting bloc in international forums. This could be used to focus worldwide attention and condemnation on threats to Botswana's territorial integrity. The government also needed liberation groups supported by the OAU to understand and respect

69-95; Ellen Hillbom, "Diamonds or Development? A Structural Assessment of Botswana's Forty Years of Success", *Journal of Modern African Studies* 46, no. 2 (2008): 191-214.

²⁵ James Kirby, "'Our Bantustans are better than yours': Botswana, the United States, and Human Rights Idealism in the 1970s", *International History Review* 29, no. 5 (2017): 860-84; Policy Planning Council, "National Policy Paper, Southern Africa", 20 November 1968, Department of State, Office of the Historian, Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1964-1968, Volume XXIV, Africa, Document 409.

²⁶ James Kirby, "'What has Ghana got that we haven't?': Party Politics and the Right to National Self-Determination in Botswana, 1960-1966", *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 45, no. 6 (2017): 1049-74.

its policies, and avoid an escalation of activities in the territory. Seretse spoke out against apartheid, refused to exchange diplomatic representatives with South Africa, and upheld an open-door policy for refugees. However, freedom fighters were not permitted to use Botswana as a launchpad for attacks due to the threat of severe retaliation. This was a difficult high-wire walk to maintain economic links with neighbouring regimes and strengthen political relationships with independent Africa. By the early 1970s, Gaborone's delicate position and anti-racialist standpoints were supported by Nyerere and Zambia's President Kenneth Kaunda, and Botswana began to establish itself within OAU circles.²⁷

Gaborone walked another tightrope between East and West. Seretse was clear before independence in being open to relations with any country who was friendly with Botswana, wishing to avoid a split into either political camp.²⁸ He spoke of non-alignment often in the context of proclaiming the autonomy of his government, which was not answerable to any outside authority.²⁹ M. P. K. Nwako, Seretse's representative at a conference of non-aligned countries in Dar es Salaam in April 1970, gave a key speech on Botswana's policy. Gaborone saw non-alignment as a positive concept, Nwako explained, which involved speaking out on Cold War issues. Botswana had freedom of choice and to make up its mind according to its own wants and values.³⁰ Seretse followed this up five months later at the Non-Aligned Summit in Lusaka. Non-alignment, for Seretse, meant a diversification of foreign relationships, the ability to cultivate Botswana's own belief system and path to development, and an avoidance of external military intervention by East or West on African soil. He

²⁷ Seretse, speech to welcome Kaunda, 21 May 1968, Botswana National Archives and Records Services, Gaborone (BNARS) BNB 1164; Nyerere, speech at banquet given in honour of Seretse, 28 August 1973, TNA FCO 45/1272.

²⁸ Seretse, Presidential address delivered at the National Congress at Lobatsi, 28 March 1964, Senate House Library, University of London (SHL) PP.BS.BDP; Seretse, "The President's Election Message", January 1965, SHL PP.BS.BDP.

²⁹ Seretse, Presidential address at eighth annual conference in Kanye, 5 April 1969, BNARS BNB 9100.

³⁰ Nwako, statement at Preparatory Conference of Non-Aligned Countries in Dar es Salaam, April 1970, in *Non-Aligned Conference: Lusaka, 1970* (Gaborone: Government Printer, 1970), 12-3.

criticised the West for its arms supplies to South Africa and the Soviet Union's 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia.³¹

In practice, Botswana's non-aligned standpoint was complicated by the regional context, making a settled foreign policy difficult to find in its early years. South Africa and Rhodesia were doggedly anti-Communist, as the Soviets, the Chinese, and the North Koreans militarily supported freedom fighters in the region. A hint of Communist alignment in Gaborone could have been used to justify a crippling hostile response from the white minority regimes. Seretse was hesitant to forge relations with Communist countries and permit Communist embassies in the capital due to a perceived threat of subversion and a rise in secret intelligence activities from both East and West. There was also an ideological element. The President broadcast at a party conference in March 1970 that 'our closest relationships are with those countries who share our commitment to democracy'.³² Seretse vocally disparaged the concept of Socialism and favoured a capitalist economy. Tanzania and Zambia, Botswana's closest OAU partners, were in a geopolitically easier position to engineer closer cooperative links with the East. Their philosophies of African Socialism were compatible with the collectivist ideologies of the PRC and DPRK. The PRC built trust in Lusaka and Dar es Salaam through their funding of the Tan-Zam railway project in the 1970s, including a zero-interest loan of nearly 1 billion Chinese yuan.³³ Tanzania and Zambia, by the late 1960s, also formed part of the DPRK's hard-core group of African supporters.³⁴ Botswana could only follow cautiously in their footsteps. Gaborone slowly established

³¹ Seretse, statement at the Third Summit Conference of Non-Aligned Nations in Lusaka, 8-10 September 1970, in *Non-Aligned Conference*, 3-4.

³² Seretse, speech at Democratic Party conference in Molepolole, 28 March 1970, FCO 45/433.

³³ Wei Song, "Seeking New Allies in Africa: China's Policy towards Africa during the Cold War as Reflected in the Construction of the Tanzania-Zambia Railway", *Journal of Modern Chinese History* 9, no. 1 (2015): 46-65.

³⁴ B. K. Gills, *Korea versus Korea: A Case of Contested Legitimacy* (London: Routledge, 1996), 164.

diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union in March 1970 and permitted a resident mission in September 1976.³⁵

Gaborone's long-term strategic interests relied on a peaceful transition to African majority rule across southern Africa. This objective was more important than material assistance from any single donor, as Botswana's economic advancement could be depleted if it was to be engulfed in a neighbouring conflict. The Nixon administration, from 1970, relaxed America's isolationist posture towards South Africa and Rhodesia, treating them as reliable stalwarts against Communist infiltration in the region.³⁶ However, Lisbon's decision in 1974 to end its African colonial wars helped to confirm the reality that the remaining white minority regimes could not guarantee stability in the region.³⁷ Just as the US was judging Botswana on its UN votes, Gaborone was judging Washington on its policies in southern Africa from a moral and empirical standpoint. American diplomats, by the mid-1970s, recognised that this dissatisfaction was reflected in Botswana's increasing opposition to Washington's position on non-African issues.³⁸ The US maintained their diplomatic pressure, but Seretse faced bigger problems. Regional instability worsened throughout the 1970s, as shown in the 1976 Soweto Uprising, the escalation of the Rhodesian Bush War, and Cuba's intervention against South African and American-backed forces in Angola.³⁹ In times of emergency, not only did Washington continue its donor support, African states also stepped

³⁵ Kwante M. C. Kwante and Boga Thura Manatsha, "Origins and Dynamics of the Botswana-Soviet Union Relations, 1960s to 1990", *Botswana Notes and Records* 48 (2016): 91-2.

³⁶ Anthony Lake, *The Tar Baby Option: American Policy toward Southern Rhodesia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 123-157. See also, under 'Option 2', National Security Council Interdepartmental Group for Africa, 'Study in Response to National Security Study Memorandum 39: Southern Africa', 9 December 1969, FRUS 1969-1976, Volume XXVIII, Southern Africa, Document 17.

³⁷ John Daniel, "Racism, the Cold War and South Africa's regional security strategies 1948-1990", *Cold War in Southern Africa: White Power, Black Liberation*, ed. Sue Onslow (London: Routledge, 2009), 41.

³⁸ Embassy Gaborone to Department of State, 22 August 1975, Hoover Institution Library and Archives, Stanford University, David Benjamin Bolen Papers (DBB), Box/Folder 4:4.

³⁹ Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

up their defence of Botswana in international forums. Seretse was vindicated in taking a risk on the China and Korea votes to cultivate Botswana's non-aligned image and move closer to independent Africa.

Two Chinas

Taipei beat Beijing in the race to establish diplomatic links with Botswana at independence.⁴⁰ BDP members in the Legislative Assembly, soon after their electoral win in March 1965, rejected the possibility of accepting aid from Communist China.⁴¹ The ROC was quick to reach out to the HCTs to establish relations, build consular posts, and set-up small aid programs. This was done to gain votes at the UN on matters relating to China and curb Beijing's influence in the region, which was evident among opposition parties in Bechuanaland.⁴² In 1966, Gaborone invited both the PRC and ROC to attend independence celebrations. Only the ROC accepted the offer, as Beijing refused to be on equal standing with Taipei. This paved the way for Gaborone to establish relations with Taiwan at the end of the year.⁴³ The BDP's fears of getting too close to Communist China were eased. Gaborone knew its connections with Taipei kept Beijing at some distance, at least in the short-term. By 1970, Seretse realised that by not engaging with the PRC he was allowing opposition parties to enhance their own links and gain support. Five opposition members in the National Assembly had visited Communist China at the invitation of the PRC and received political, ideological, and other forms of 'training'.⁴⁴ Botswana's 1966-70 stance on China was unsustainable entering the 1970s when regional instability worsened, Gaborone's non-aligned

⁴⁰ On cross-Taiwan Strait relations, see C. X. George Wei, "The Taiwan Issue and the Taiwan Factor: Studying Cross-Strait Relations within the Global Context", in *China-Taiwan Relations in a Global Context: Taiwan's Foreign Policy and Relations*, ed. C. X. George Wei (New York: Routledge, 2012), 1-11.

⁴¹ Seretse, Molomo, and Sim, 26 March 1965, in *Official Report of the Debates of the First Meeting of the First Session* (Gaborone: Bechuanaland Legislative Assembly, 1965), 55, 57, 62.

⁴² Latimer to British Government Representative in Maseru, 15 July 1965, TNA CO 1048/638; Latimer to Campbell, 12 August 1965, TNA CO 1048/638.

⁴³ Syson to Anderson, 28 February 1971, TNA FCO 45/809.

⁴⁴ Anderson to Wilson, 20 January 1970, TNA FCO 45/436.

credentials were tested within the OAU, and Beijing developed a greater presence on the international stage.

Botswana's defining moment on the China question came in October 1971 when it voted in favour of a resolution to recognise the PRC over the ROC as the only legitimate representatives of China at the UN. The vote effectively expelled Taiwan from the UN and its related bodies. America's position was that both the PRC and ROC should be represented to reflect political realities and encourage reconciliation. Beijing rejected this proposal as a scheme by the Nixon administration to fabricate the existence of two Chinas when Taiwan was part of Communist China. The UN General Assembly (UNGA), from 18-26 October, debated three draft resolutions across twelve meetings. The first text, known as the 'Albanian resolution', aimed to recognise the PRC as the only rightful representatives of China and dislodge Chiang Kai-Shek's delegation. The second claimed that any move to expel the ROC should be treated as an 'important question' under the UN Charter, thereby requiring the first draft resolution to seek a two-thirds majority. The third resolution affirmed that both the PRC and ROC should be represented at the UN and that the PRC should take the ROC's place as one of the five permanent members of the Security Council (UNSC). The US co-sponsored the second and third draft resolutions.

Opponents of the 'important question' resolution argued that the matter was not one of admitting or expelling a member. The issue, the PRC claimed, was of restoring the rights of the only lawful representatives of China. The US attained enough support to have the UNGA vote first on the 'important question' resolution, yet it was rejected with 55 votes for, 59 against, and 15 abstentions. The UNGA then adopted the 'Albanian resolution' 76 to 35, with 17 abstentions, as Resolution 2758 (XXVI) on 25 October. No vote was taken on the

two-China resolution. The US, in the lead up to the vote, exerted considerable pressure on Gaborone to support its 'friendly' proposal and oppose the 'hostile' draft resolution.

Botswana ultimately voted in favour of Resolution 2758 (XXVI), alongside many key OAU members like Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Zambia, and against the US. Botswana's delegates also abstained on the 'important question' resolution.⁴⁵ Seretse's actions were a surprise amongst British and American diplomats, especially the latter, who overestimated the government's allegiance to the West.

Seretse was favourable to the US position, according to the British High Commission, in December 1970. Anderson reported that Gaborone's policy was to support the two-China solution.⁴⁶ In 1969 and 1970, Botswana's UN delegates voted for the 'important question' resolution. Yet, Botswana shifted its vote against the 'Albanian resolution' in 1969 to an abstention the following year.⁴⁷ This was alarming to American diplomats as they set out to gather support for the 'important question' resolution, which would have virtually blocked the 'Albanian resolution' and possibly led to the success of the two-China resolution. Washington made several outreaches to Gaborone before the vote, including subtle threats regarding their ongoing economic assistance. A State Department official approached Botswana's UN delegation and implied the vote may have consequences for the proposed Bot-Zam road project.⁴⁸ Botswana's government officials were worried their UN vote would

⁴⁵ *Yearbook of the United Nations 1971*, The Yearbook of the United Nations, <http://www.unmultimedia.org/searchers/yearbook/page.jsp?volume=1971&bookpage=i> (accessed 28 December 2017); Philip Hsiaopong Liu, "Dual Representation: Reviewing the Republic of China's Last Battle in the UN", *Issues & Studies* 47, no. 2 (2011): 87-118.

⁴⁶ Anderson to Wilson, 22 December 1970, TNA FCO 45/809.

⁴⁷ *Yearbook of the United Nations 1969*, The Yearbook of the United Nations, <http://www.unmultimedia.org/searchers/yearbook/page.jsp?volume=1969&bookpage=i> (accessed 28 December 2017); *Yearbook of the United Nations 1970*, The Yearbook of the United Nations, <http://www.unmultimedia.org/searchers/yearbook/page.jsp?volume=1970&bookpage=i> (accessed 28 December 2017); Parsons to Wilson, 5 January 1971, TNA FCO 45/809.

⁴⁸ Anderson to Wilson, 6 December 1971, TNA FCO 45/809.

lead to others being prioritised in aid distribution to the region. Lesotho and Swaziland co-sponsored the American-backed draft resolutions.

The President knew the political realities underlying development aid. He was successful in convincing Washington that Botswana advanced US objectives in southern Africa, such as its promotion of regional stability and liberal-democratic values. However, he resented the use of aid as a carrot-and-stick to force smaller states into line at the UN.⁴⁹ America's threats may have only further reinforced his defiant position. Richard Nixon, when reading that Seretse was to abstain on the 'important question' resolution, wrote that aid should be cancelled in the margins of the report.⁵⁰ He was furious with Botswana in private conversations. The American President declared, as overheard on the White House tape recorder, that 'no aid at all is to go to those black bastards unless they vote with us – I mean none'.⁵¹ He regretted the State Department's support for Botswana, which he blamed on previous administrations.⁵² Such anger was the result of the inconvenience faced by Nixon and Henry Kissinger, his National Security Advisor, that Botswana's vote was worth just as much as any other and that Seretse could not be simply 'bought'.⁵³

Seretse's office, despite Washington's apparent shock, clarified Botswana's position before the vote. Gaborone believed that the PRC should be represented at the UN, the issue was one of rightful representation, and the two-China resolution failed on legal and procedural grounds. The President could not support the 'important question' resolution as it

⁴⁹ Anderson to Wilson, 6 December 1971, TNA FCO 45/809.

⁵⁰ Haig to Nixon, October 1971, FRUS 1969-1976, Volume V, United Nations, 1969-1972, Document 422.

⁵¹ Nixon, Oval Office conversation, 22 October 1971, nixontapes.org, http://nixontapeaudio.org/chron2/rmn_e599b.mp3 (accessed 28 December 2017).

⁵² Nixon, Oval Office conversation, 28 October 1971, nixontapes.org, http://nixontapeaudio.org/chron2/rmn_e606a.mp3 (accessed 4 January 2018).

⁵³ Nixon and Kissinger, Oval Office conversation, 27 October 1971, http://nixontapeaudio.org/chron2/rmn_e608a.mp3 (accessed 28 December 2017).

would effectively deny the PRC's representation at the UN.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, American and British confusion was understandable. Seretse's decision was opposed by all cabinet ministers and required the President's constitutional executive powers.⁵⁵ The move was seemingly contradictory, as Gaborone maintained diplomatic relations with Taiwan to the exclusion of Beijing. Anderson still expected the PRC to remain distant and without a resident diplomatic mission, given the anticipated disruption it would cause with Pretoria.⁵⁶ It would still be a few years until Botswana's diplomatic relations would be fully readjusted on the two Chinas.

Gaborone's next move was to recognise the PRC and break relations with the ROC on 25 March 1974. The action followed twelve months of cold communication lines with Taipei, signalling it was time for the Taiwanese Embassy to close. The BDP's official explanation was that this decision was consistent with Botswana's vote at the UN in 1971.⁵⁷ Taipei, on 5 April 1974, announced it had suspended relations with Botswana and would withdraw its diplomatic, agricultural, and medical missions.⁵⁸ The *Botswana Daily News* announced in January 1975 that diplomatic ties with the PRC would be established at the ambassadorial level by the end of the year.⁵⁹ The PRC, by August 1976, had purchased the ROC's Embassy and Beijing's Ambassador presented his credentials in Gaborone.⁶⁰ Beijing's outreach to Botswana formed part of its larger policy toward Africa in the 1970s. The PRC, as described

⁵⁴ Office of the President, "Chinese Representation at the United Nations", 7 October 1971, TNA FCO 45/809; "Botswana voted for seating Peking", *Botswana Daily News*, October 26, 1971.

⁵⁵ Thomas Tlou, Neil Parsons, and Willie Henderson, *Seretse Khama 1921-80* (Braamfontein: Macmillan, 1995), 302.

⁵⁶ "Ties will be strengthened", *Botswana Daily News*, November 1, 1971; Anderson to Moore, 17 November 1971 and 1 December 1971, TNA FCO 45/809.

⁵⁷ Botswana Democratic Party, "Election Manifesto: Build Botswana", 1974, BNARS BNB 2464.

⁵⁸ Embassy Taipei to Department of State, 8 April 1974, NARA RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79 Electronic Telegrams, 1974TAIPEI02170.

⁵⁹ Embassy Gaborone to Department of State, 8 January 1975, NARA RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79 Electronic Telegrams, 1975GABORO00034.

⁶⁰ Embassy Gaborone to Department of State, 2 September 1976, NARA RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79 Electronic Telegrams, 1975GABORO01164.

by historians Jeremy Friedman and Gregg A. Brazinsky, adjusted their strategy in competing with the Soviet Union and the US for influence on the continent. Beijing aimed to assemble a wider coalition of support, featuring some Western-leaning states, just as the ideological intensity of the Cultural Revolution was diminishing and its diplomacy became more moderate.⁶¹

Seretse's greatest overture to the East was his 13-day trip in July-August 1976 to mainland China. He was accompanied by his wife, Ruth, and almost thirty government officials. The Chinese honoured Seretse with banquets in his honour in Beijing, Shanghai, Changsha, and Nanking. The delegation toured extensively to see China's apparent progress in agricultural development, self-reliance, and industrialisation, and historical sites like Mao's birthplace in Hunan province.⁶² Seretse gave a speech at each banquet. These talks were much unlike his addresses in Western Europe and North America, where he would emphasise the themes of democracy and individual human rights.⁶³ In East Asia, the President adopted a new line of oratory to suit his audience on the themes of anti-imperialism, neo-colonialism, collectivist development, Third World solidarity, and anti-capitalist exploitation.

Chairman Mao did not meet with Botswana's delegation, as the Chinese leader remained ill and died about a month after the visit. Seretse was full of praise for Mao,

⁶¹ Jeremy Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 198-201; Gregg A. Brazinsky, *Winning the Third World: Sino-American Rivalry during the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 309. See also Ian Taylor, *China and Africa: Engagement and Compromise* (London: Routledge, 2006), 34, 37, 43-4.

⁶² Tlou, Parsons, and Henderson, *Seretse Khama*, 332-3.

⁶³ Gwendolen M. Carter and E. Philip Morgan, eds., *From the Frontline: Speeches of Sir Seretse Khama* (London: Rex Collings, 1980).

depicting him as ‘a man of vision, an innovator and a true freedom fighter’.⁶⁴ Botswana had very little in common with Mao’s China. Seretse’s speeches relied heavily on the one area of strong agreement between the two states: the end of white minority rule in South Africa, Rhodesia, and South-West Africa. Seretse appreciated Chinese support for freedom and self-determination in the region. However, the President’s philosophy of non-racial democracy, built upon an open political system and an individualist ethos, was not swayed by Chinese propaganda. His praise for the PRC is better read as a sign that the President had found his voice as a non-aligned actor. Even if much of his speeches in China were filled with shallow phraseology to please his hosts, Seretse showed he was free to charm whomever he wished if it suited his goals.

Botswana found considerable material benefits from its links with the PRC. This countered the risks of attracting foreign intelligence activities in Gaborone and setting a precedent for permitting other Communist embassies, like the Soviets. Seretse signed an agreement in Beijing for a \$16.6 million loan, in historical USD, for development projects. The terms of the loan were interest-free and to be repaid over twenty years.⁶⁵ China also offered military aid a short time before the creation of the Botswana Defence Force (BDF) in March 1977. The US denied Gaborone’s requests for military aid and Seretse was reluctant to accept offers of Soviet arms. Neither the US nor the Soviet Union delivered military aid to Botswana until the early 1980s. This left an opportunity for the Chinese to offer a sizable package of small arms and ammunition at no cost.⁶⁶ Seretse was validated in his non-aligned

⁶⁴ Seretse Khama, *Speeches by His Excellency the President, Sir Seretse Khama, on the Occasion of his Visits to India, United States of America, United Kingdom, Canada, China and North Korea* (Gaborone: The Government Printer, 1976), 27-38.

⁶⁵ Embassy Gaborone to Department of State, 19 October 1976, NARA RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79 Electronic Telegrams, 1976GABORO01923; Masire, 6 December 1978, in *Official Report of the First Meeting of the Fifth Session of the Third Parliament* (Gaborone: Government Printer, 1978).

⁶⁶ Department of State to US Delegation, 30 December 1976, NARA RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79 Electronic Telegrams, 1976STATE313047; Embassy Mbabane to Department of State, 21 July 1978, NARA RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79 Electronic Telegrams, 1978MBABAN02507.

stance, telling an American delegation in November 1978 that the US was indifferent to ‘those who share its commitment to democracy and respect for human rights’.⁶⁷ The Chinese weapons, while not up to the standard of BDF expectations, demonstrated there were tangible rewards for Gaborone’s diversification.⁶⁸

Quett Masire, Seretse’s deputy, took the blame in his memoirs for Botswana’s early links with Taiwan. He claimed he was naïve on foreign affairs, eliding the anxiety within the BDP over potential Communist interference and South Africa’s reaction. More revealingly, he confirmed that Nyerere told Gaborone that the Chinese could be trusted.⁶⁹ Maitseo M. Bolaane, a historian at the University of Botswana, uncovered that Kaunda also encouraged Seretse to open relations with the PRC.⁷⁰ Zambia and Tanzania played an important role in the late 1960s and early 1970s in vouching for Botswana’s anti-colonial credentials and legitimacy in the OAU. Neither Taipei nor Beijing were strategically crucial for Botswana, and there was much to gain in a symbolic shift in diplomatic relations. Gaborone was slow to readjust on China over a 10-year period, mainly because of their caution over a possible rupture with Pretoria, which treated Communism as an existential threat to the South African white minority.⁷¹ The apartheid regime steadily accepted Gaborone’s growing confidence with an independent foreign policy. While Seretse made moves in small steps, each slight realignment marked a victory for Botswana’s assertion of sovereignty against the apartheid regime. The China question was less about Botswana’s Chinese affinities than its African ones.

⁶⁷ Embassy Gaborone to Department of State, 5 December 1978, NARA RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79 Electronic Telegrams, 1978GABORO03832.

⁶⁸ Embassy Gaborone to Department of State, 9 June 1977, NARA RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79 Electronic Telegrams, 1978GABORO00812.

⁶⁹ Stephen R. Lewis Jr., ed., *Quett Ketumile Joni Masire: Very Brave or Very Foolish? Memoirs of an African Democrat* (Gaborone: Macmillan Botswana Publishing, 2006), 300.

⁷⁰ Bolaane, “China’s Relations with Botswana”, 147-8.

⁷¹ Jamie Miller, *An African Volk: The Apartheid Regime and its Search for Survival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 10.

Two Koreas

Gaborone's policy on the Korean Peninsula in 1974-75 cemented Botswana's non-aligned identity for an African audience. Seretse made a provocative standpoint on the issue of peaceful reunification between North Korea and South Korea that was hostile to the US and its military troop deployment in East Asia. The matter tested Botswana's independent foreign policy-making just as relations with Communist China became more stable. The DPRK sought to build political links with independent African countries to earn their diplomatic support in international forums as the sole legitimate government of Korea.⁷² Pyongyang was more convincing than Seoul in aligning itself with the Third World themes of anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism, and national self-determination. The DPRK argued its solution to tensions on the Korean Peninsula, including the withdrawal of American forces from South Korea, was compatible with the values of the non-aligned movement, southern African freedom fighters, and African nationalist leaders.⁷³

The North Koreans arrived in Gaborone in February 1973 on a visit explicitly aimed at securing Botswana's support on the Korea question at the UN. The delegation carried enough red-covered propaganda material to be provided to all government ministers and senior staff. Seretse's government treated the visit as a harmless publicity exercise. Gaborone stalled on North Korea's request for diplomatic relations, given Botswana's prior relations

⁷² Benjamin R. Young, 'An Emotional Relationship: Trust, Admiration, and Fear in North Korea-Zimbabwe Relations, 1976-1988', *S/N Korean Humanities* 4, issue 2 (2018): 130; Benjamin R. Young, 'Not There for the Nutmeg: North Korean Advisors in Grenada and Pyongyang's Internationalism, 1979-1983', *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 7, no. 2 (2018): 367-8.

⁷³ Lyong Choi and Il-young Jeong, "North Korea and Zimbabwe, 1978-1982: From the Strategic Alliance to the Symbolic Comradeship between Kim Il Sung and Robert Mugabe", *Cold War History* 17, issue 4 (2017): 331-4; Gills, *Korea versus Korea*, 98, 145, 188.

with South Korea since 1968.⁷⁴ The visit was one of the first of many intensive lobbying efforts for Botswana's support on both sides of the Korean diplomatic war.⁷⁵

The dispute between the two Koreas was on the terms for negotiations towards peaceful reunification. The UNGA was concerned with the need to reduce tensions on the Peninsula. While neither the DPRK nor the ROK were UN members during these discussions, their representatives were able to contribute to the debates. In 1974, Pyongyang argued that it had pursued a program of peaceful reunification. Seoul, they claimed, was opposed to cooperation with the DPRK. More controversially, the North Koreans argued that for a peace agreement to be successful all foreign troops under the UN flag had to withdraw from South Korea. The ROK's position was that the UN Command and US forces in South Korea had not interfered with negotiations and were needed to maintain peace. Seoul accused Pyongyang of using the issue of foreign troops to avoid continued dialogue. Their representative explained that the 40,000 US troops were stationed in Korea at the request of Seoul under a mutual defence treaty.⁷⁶

The UNGA debated two draft resolutions. The first, 'friendly' to the US, expressed the UNGA's support for continued dialogue toward peaceful reunification and, after a French amendment, proposed that the UNSC would consider the dissolution of the UN Command under the terms of the July 1953 Armistice Agreement. The second, 'hostile' to the US, stated that the presence of all foreign troops in South Korea damaged the prospects of successful

⁷⁴ 'North Korean delegation visits Botswana', *Botswana Daily News*, February 28, 1973; Anderson to Cook, 8 March 1973, TNA FCO 45/1283.

⁷⁵ Embassy Seoul to Department of State, 7 April 1973, NARA RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79 Electronic Telegrams, 1973SEOUL02125; US Mission UN to Department of State, 26 October 1973, NARA RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79 Electronic Telegrams, 1973USUNN04388.

⁷⁶ On US troop numbers, see Holly Wilson, "Beyond the Gates: Local Interactions with U.S. Military Bases in Italy, 1951-1999" (PhD diss., La Trobe University, 2018).

dialogue and reunification, and suggested that all troops under the UN flag be withdrawn. The UNGA, on 17 December, adopted the first draft resolution as Resolution 3333 (XXIX) 61 to 43, with 31 abstentions. No vote was taken on the second draft resolution in the UNGA, but it was narrowly defeated in the First Committee 48 to 48, with 38 abstentions. Botswana voted against Resolution 3333 (XXIX), alongside states like China, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Guinea, Tanzania, and Zambia.⁷⁷

Washington's internal advice a year before the vote suggested that Botswana would favour their resolution. Gaborone believed, according to the Americans, that the UN Command should not be dissolved.⁷⁸ The South Koreans, in early 1974, were keen to win Gaborone's favour by adding agricultural assistance to their earlier commitments of minor financial and medical aid.⁷⁹ Hakoo Yeon, South Korea's Ambassador based in Nairobi, was invited to present his credentials in August and gained some insights on how Gaborone would make up its mind. He agreed with American diplomats that B. K. Kgari, Botswana's Foreign Minister, was ill-informed on his own portfolio and that the final decisions were made by Seretse. The US Embassy recorded the centrality of regional affairs and the mainstream-OAU position in Gaborone's view of the Korea question.⁸⁰ Nonetheless, the Americans expected Botswana to merely abstain on their 'friendly' resolution until mid-November.⁸¹

⁷⁷ *Yearbook of the United Nations 1974*, The Yearbook of the United Nations, <http://www.unmultimedia.org/searchers/yearbook/page.jsp?volume=1970&bookpage=i> (accessed 31 December 2017).

⁷⁸ Embassy Gaborone to Department of State, 14 November 1973, NARA RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79 Electronic Telegrams, 1973GABORO01666.

⁷⁹ Yeon and Bolen, memorandum of conversation, 27 June 1974, DBB 5:2.

⁸⁰ Embassy Gaborone to Department of State, 22 August 1974, DBB 5:2.

⁸¹ Department of State to Embassy Seoul, 10 October 1974, NARA RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79 Electronic Telegrams, 1974STATE223504; US Mission UN to Department of State, 15 November 1974, NARA RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79 Electronic Telegrams, 1974USUNN05096.

Seretse's government, still thought to be moderate and fairly pro-Western, swayed towards a more radical stand. Thebe D. Mogami, Botswana's UN representative, informed the Americans that Botswana would support the 'hostile' resolution if it was held to a vote because the text was 'non-aligned'.⁸² Later, M. C. Tibone, Botswana's Secretary for External Affairs, elaborated that because American troops were not explicitly mentioned in the 'hostile' resolution, it did not have to consider US interests.⁸³ In late November, Ambassador Bolen emphasised to Seretse the immense gravity of the issue for the US, adding further pressure after multiple visits to Gaborone from the North Koreans and South Koreans.⁸⁴ The outcome of this diplomatic contest was revealed on 5 December, when Radio Botswana announced that Gaborone and Pyongyang would establish relations at the Ambassadorial level.⁸⁵

The Korea question at the UN became more controversial in the following year. The US co-sponsored a draft resolution noting America's willingness to dissolve the UN Command as long as the Armistice Agreement was maintained. The resolution encouraged dialogue toward peaceful reunification and negotiations to replace the Armistice Agreement with a peace treaty. It was adopted on 18 November 1975 as Resolution 3390 A (XXX) 59 to 51, with 29 abstentions. Another draft resolution, co-sponsored by many of the DPRK's supporters, declared that peace was not possible under the terms of the armistice. It sought the termination of the UN Command, called upon the 'real parties' of the Armistice

⁸² US Mission UN to Department of State, 23 November 1974, NARA RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79 Electronic Telegrams, 1974USUNN05364; US Mission UN to Department of State, 4 December 1974, NARA RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79 Electronic Telegrams, 1974USUNN05662.

⁸³ Embassy Gaborone to Department of State, 5 December 1974, NARA RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79 Electronic Telegrams, 1974GABORO01665.

⁸⁴ US Mission UN to Department of State, 27 November 1974, NARA RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79 Electronic Telegrams, 1974USUNN05463; Embassy Gaborone to Department of State, 27 November 1974, NARA RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79 Electronic Telegrams, 1974GABORO01630.

⁸⁵ Embassy Gaborone to Department of State, 5 December 1974, NARA RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79 Electronic Telegrams, 1974GABORO01661.

Agreement to replace it with a peace agreement, and demanded the withdrawal of all foreign troops under the UN flag. This text was also adopted on 18 November as Resolution 3390 B (XXX) 54 to 43, with 42 abstentions.

The North Koreans alleged that the US was violating principles of sovereignty and non-interference through their troop presence in South Korea and were the reason for the failure of reunification. The US, they argued, was preparing for war. Seoul claimed that Pyongyang had violated the Armistice Agreement and needlessly postponed dialogue. The DPRK's insistence on negotiations between the 'real parties' to the Armistice Agreement effectively excluded South Korea from such talks, which was unacceptable to supporters of America's 'friendly' resolution. The main disagreement was that while Washington and Seoul were willing to terminate the UN Command after replacing the armistice with a peace agreement, Pyongyang wanted the UN Command dissolved and troops under the UN flag withdrawn before the Armistice Agreement could be replaced. Botswana voted against America's 'friendly' resolution and in favour of the 'hostile' one.⁸⁶

Ambassador Yeon was frustrated in his talks with Seretse's government in July 1975. Masire and Archibald Mogwe, Botswana's new Foreign Minister, questioned why there was a delay in dissolving the UN Command and the need for US troops in South Korea. Yeon acknowledged his lack of persuasiveness on the issue was due to the influence of Zambia and Tanzania, who began to cooperate more closely with Botswana in encouraging political change in Rhodesia. These countries formed part of the FLS, which sought to end apartheid and white minority rule in southern Africa. Bolen was realistic in noting the difficulty of

⁸⁶ *Yearbook of the United Nations 1975*, The Yearbook of the United Nations, <http://www.unmultimedia.org/searchers/yearbook/page.jsp?volume=1975&bookpage=i> (accessed 31 December 2017).

convincing Gaborone to step out of line with its core OAU and FLS allies on an issue that was not vital to its wellbeing.⁸⁷ Jong Sung Gyn, North Korea's Ambassador resident in Lusaka, presented his credentials a short time later. He took the opportunity to insist that US troops were obstructing peaceful reunification on the Peninsula and must be withdrawn.⁸⁸

Gaborone communicated its voting position to the Americans and the British in late August, siding with the North Koreans. Bolen told Mogwe that Pyongyang's expectations were unsound given the ongoing tensions on the Peninsula. The Foreign Minister, who was well versed in Gyn's line of argument, responded that the DPRK's position was consistent with the principle of self-determination. Mogwe also disagreed that the reference to 'real parties' prevented South Korea from taking part in the talks and thought they should be included. This revealed at least some philosophical agreement with the Americans beneath the official posture of non-alignment. Masire later noted his government's reservations over the 'hostile' resolution's exclusion of South Korea from negotiations.⁸⁹ Bolen reiterated to Gaborone that cooperation or non-cooperation on the Korea question would be reflected in their bilateral relations, including US support in condemning territorial incursions and ongoing material aid.⁹⁰ The Americans began to realise, however, why their argumentation and threats were ineffective in swaying Botswana's vote. Bolen, in a telegram to the State Department, highlighted the broader failure of the US on southern African issues, where it was strategically linked with South Africa and Rhodesia, and not doing enough to encourage regime change. Botswana, like many other African states, was not willing to risk being

⁸⁷ Embassy Gaborone to Department of State, 14 July 1975, NARA RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79 Electronic Telegrams, 1975GABORO00927; "Special Korean envoy pays visit to Botswana", *Botswana Daily News*, July 17, 1975.

⁸⁸ Embassy Gaborone to Department of State, 7 August 1975, DBB 4:4.

⁸⁹ Embassy Gaborone to Department of State, 27 October 1975, NARA RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79 Electronic Telegrams, 1975GABORO01458.

⁹⁰ Embassy Gaborone to Department of State, 25 September and 17 October, DBB 4:4; Embassy Gaborone to Department of State, 2 October 1975, DBB: 6:3.

labelled a ‘maverick’ within the OAU by helping the US with its problems in East Asia when the Americans appeared to do so little to help Africans suffering under white minority rule.⁹¹

Seretse’s 1976 trip to Communist China was followed immediately by a visit to Pyongyang. He told a mass rally in the capital that the two countries shared a common historical experience, omitting any mention of the obvious differences between them. Botswana embodied Kim Il-Sung’s Juche ideology, Seretse claimed, which included a spirit of political and economic independence. As illustrated by historian Benjamin R. Young, many African leaders feigned admiration for Juche for their own political and material gain.⁹² The President justified his support for the DPRK’s position based on a belief in self-determination and the need for both sides in Korea to decide their future without foreign influence or interference. He also praised the North Korean leader as ‘a legend’ and ‘an eminent revolutionary’ who supported the liberation struggle in southern Africa.⁹³ The delegation did not enjoy their North Korea trip as much as the China one, not least because it came without the same rewards of development or military aid.

Their relations lacked genuine warmth or cordiality. Botswana’s officials mocked the repeated descriptions of propaganda material by Korean interpreters as featuring ‘our honoured and respected leader giving some on-the-spot advice’. One interpreter was alarmed during a game of billiards one night when Seretse stretched himself full-length across the table to make a difficult shot. A member of the Botswana delegation explained ‘that is *our* honoured and respected leader giving some on-the-spot advice’. The President was permitted

⁹¹ Embassy Gaborone to Department of State, 22 August 1975, DBB 4:4; Embassy Gaborone to Department of State, 28 August 1975, DBB 5:2.

⁹² Benjamin R. Young, ‘The Struggle for Legitimacy: North Korea’s Relations with Africa, 1965–1992’, *BAKS Papers* 16 (2015): 102.

⁹³ Seretse, *Speeches*, 39–42.

to lose the game to his subordinates, much to the dismay of North Korean officials.⁹⁴ Seretse was known for his good sense of humour when dealing with otherwise awkward interactions with foreign leaders and representatives. He was also known for his pragmatism, which dated back to his renunciation of the chieftaincy to end his enforced exile, his political cooperation with the British before independence, and his economic cooperation with the apartheid regime as President. It is unlikely that Seretse would have regarded South Korea's and America's position on reunification to be entirely unreasonable. His support for the DPRK was not an ideological shift, but a practical one to reaffirm ties to OAU and FLS support networks engaged with the growing crisis in southern Africa.

Conclusion

Seretse's resolute stand for the PRC and DPRK at the UN was a gamble that paid off to a considerable extent, with no direct consequences for Botswana's favourability among its traditional allies. Washington came to understand and respect Botswana's increasingly non-aligned standpoint. There is no indication that US aid commitments were readjusted as a result of the inconvenience caused by Gaborone's voting patterns. Indeed, a BDP government that had better connections within the OAU made it more useful as a moderate partner in the region. Gaborone found greater security in diversifying its sources of aid in East Asia. The white minority regimes in South Africa and Rhodesia continued to undermine Botswana's territorial integrity. They would, however, face a seemingly boundless league that spoke in defence of Botswana. The clearest success of Seretse's non-aligned position came in January 1977, when the UNSC considered the Botswana question. A chorus of African voices spoke in support of Resolution 403, which condemned Rhodesia's hostile acts against Botswana

⁹⁴ Emphasis added. Tlou, Parsons, and Henderson, *Seretse Khama*, 333-4.

and called on the international community to deliver substantial economic support.⁹⁵ A UN Mission, which visited the following month, recommended an aid commitment of \$25.6 million USD to help Botswana cope with the flow of refugees.⁹⁶

This article has shown the profound capacity of Botswana to assert its autonomy in the realm of international relations. The country was geopolitically vulnerable, surrounded by hostile white minority regimes, and economically underdeveloped, which left it dependent on external aid. Seretse was required to navigate the binary of East and West in the Cold War, as well as the overlapping binary of African and white minority-ruled states on the continent. The President, at independence in 1966, lacked credibility in OAU circles as a genuine opponent of colonialism and apartheid, and Botswana's long-term viability was yet to be proven. Botswana, within ten years, demonstrated that it was truly autonomous and beholden to no foreign power. Its non-aligned position, slow to develop at first, became a crucial asset in this regard. The UNGA votes on the China and Korea questions challenged Botswana to pinpoint where it stood in the world. The President's thinking was guided by priorities and difficulties closer to home in southern Africa, not East Asia or the global Cold War. Seretse sided, not so much with Mao or Kim Il-Sung, but with key figures of the OAU like Kaunda and Nyerere. These leaders offered great moral support for Botswana by understanding their unavoidable economic relationship with South Africa, cooperating on diplomatic initiatives to promote regime change in Rhodesia, and certifying for fellow OAU members that Seretse was an indispensable partner in the anti-apartheid movement. Botswana's non-alignment, as articulated in the China and Korea votes, signalled much more than just Gaborone's stance between East and West. It showed that Botswana was a sovereign state capable of making its

⁹⁵ 'Resolution 403: Botswana-Southern Rhodesia', 14 January 1977, United Nations Security Council Resolutions, <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/403> (accessed 24 August 2018).

⁹⁶ United Nations Security Council, "Assistance to Botswana", March 1977, BNARS MICRO 588.

own choices in the face of intimidating neighbours, who threatened physical or economic coercion, and powerful foreign donors, who warned of cutting off their aid supply.

Any attempt to globalise Cold War history must acknowledge the intricacies of African foreign policy-making that went beyond the East-West dynamic. African agency was displayed in more ways than just maximising the rewards and minimising the dangers of external intervention. African leaders and diplomats had to manoeuvre a more complex landscape of diverse transnational networks and bilateral links, which often cut across the East-West landscape. American and British officials may have been at least partially correct in deeming Botswana was generally pro-West and anti-Communist based on the BDP's core principles. However, any such feeling from Gaborone was superseded by more urgent foreign policy dilemmas that required, at certain times, a show of moral force incompatible with Western objectives. The Cold War's significance in Africa is therefore altered when viewed from the vantagepoint of Accra, Yaounde, Lusaka, Maseru, or Gaborone.⁹⁷ In Nairobi, as shown by Poppy Cullen, the Cold War was used as a tool for domestic party politics.⁹⁸ Jamie Miller, who studied the perspective from Pretoria, reinterpreted 'anti-Communism as an ideology that [was] defined and refined by actors in the Global South'.⁹⁹ In similar ways, non-alignment could send a signal, beyond a Cold War stance, of state sovereignty, economic viability, anti-racialism, anti-apartheid, and pro-African unity. Gaborone used the Cold War battlegrounds of the China and Korea votes to fight its own battles in southern Africa.

⁹⁷ Gerits, "When the Bull Elephants Fight", 964.

⁹⁸ Poppy Cullen, "'Playing Cold War politics': The Cold War in Anglo-Kenyan relations in the 1960s", *Cold War History* (2017): 4, doi:10.1080/14682745.2017.1387774. On specifically urban settings, see George Roberts, 'The Assassination of Eduardo Mondlane: FRELIMO, Tanzania, and the Politics of Exile in Dar es Salaam', *Cold War History* 17, issue 1 (2017): 2.

⁹⁹ Aden Knaap, "Reintegrating Apartheid into Post-War Global History: An Interview with Jamie Miller", The Toynbee Prize Foundation, 20 December 2017, <http://toynbeeprize.org/interviews/jamie-miller/> (accessed 31 December 2017).